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THE NARRATIVE MODE. LITERATURE CURRICULUM V, TEACHER VERSION.

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THE NARRATIVE MODE CAN BEST BE UNDERSTOOD THROUGH A STUDY OF THE CONVENTIONS WHICH SHAPE A STORY'S FORM AND SUBSTANCE. OF PARTICULAR IMPORTANCE IN PERCEIVING THE INTENTION OF THE NARRATIVE IS TO LOOK AT THE CONVENTION OF POINT OF VIEW--THE "DOCUMENTARY," "FIRST-PERSON-SINGULAR," "OMNISCIENT-AUTHOR," "MIDDLE-GROUND," AND "STREAM-OF-CONSCIOUSNESS." ALSO CONTROLLING THE WAY THE STORY IS TOLD ARE SUCH CONVENTIONS OF STYLE AND SUBJECT AS THE FLASHBACK, WITHHELD INFORMATION, AND CHARACTER SCHEMATIZATION AND DEVELOPMENT. AN UNDERSTANDING OF THE DISTINGUISHING CHARACTERISTICS OF THE SUB-TYPES OF THE MODE--THE REALISTIC NOVEL, THE NON-REALISTIC ROMANCE, THE ROMANCE-GOTHIC, THE TALE OR SHORT STORY, AND A CREATIVE AMALGAM OF THE NOVEL AND ROMANCE FORMS--AND AN AWARENESS OF THE CIRCUMSTANCES UNDER WHICH WRITERS USE THESE FORMS CAN FURTHER CLARIFY THE STORYTELLER'S INTENTIONS. SEE ALSO ED 010 129 THROUGH ED 010 160, ED 010 803 THROUGH ED 010 832, TE 000 195 THROUGH TE 000 220, AND TE 000 227 THROUGH TE 000 249. (JB)

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THE NARRATIVE MODE

Literature Curriculum V

Teacher Version

TE000 206

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Teacher Version

THE NARRATIVE MODE

1. Introduction: "Tell Me a Story"

Narrative as a Mode appears in many forms, or Genres[1], and in all periods of western literature. Narrative is parable, fable, epic, allegory, saga, romance, novel, tale, short story. Furthermore, at times, and especially in an age when plays are printed as books and stand on shelves in the silence of libraries, the distinction between the Modes of Narrative and Drama may seem artificial: so much of the interest of Drama depends upon Plot, and, as in the most powerful Narratives, the dramatic Plot is in a sense also Character, and Plot-Character must unfold in the specific circumstances that are Place and Time, which is to say, Place-Time, which is to say, Setting. Drama, that is, depends heavily for its interest upon the three major ingredients of Narrative. Finally, how often even the short poem, thought of as "lyric," clearly has a narrative origin or foundation: for example, Shakespeare's sonnets; Donne's "A Valediction Forbidding Mourning"; Hopkins' sonnet, "Felix Randal" (a whole novel implicit in those fourteen lines); even Wordsworth's stark eight-liner, "A Slumber Did My Spirit Seal." The interest of writers and audiences in Narrative in its many manifestations has been magnificently pervasive, to be felt perhaps as an overwhelming cumulative response to a possible first primitive version of the child's hopeful command, "Tell me a story."

Some reasons for the dominant (as it must seem) position of Narrative in the world of imaginative literature seem to be almost self-evident. Story in its elementary forms is perhaps the simplest way of organizing and thus making sense out of our experience. "I was late getting home because--because this happened and then this happened." In terms that are concrete and immediately comprehensible, story explains us to ourselves and to our relatives and friends and quite frequently to total strangers. It may take the form of apologetics or of brag or it may seem calculated only to interest or amuse: the first perhaps an elementary and unconscious movement toward autobiography (which may be either "true" or fictional); the second may seem to be fumbling its way toward heroic epic or romance; while the third is done simply for its own sake with apparently only an aesthetic motive (but an explanatory element still there in the result). Gossip is of course Narrative, with the subject shifted from one's self (first person) to one's neighbor (third person). It need not be malicious. When it is not, the movement may be toward the realistic short story. Malice, quite apart from what it may suggest about the gossiper, usually goes disguised as righteous moral disapproval, and points with withered finger toward satire. The homeliest attempts to satisfy the child's thirst for story usually aim at the delight provided by any imaginative departure from what according to our experience seems probable and everyday: romance, fantasy, American tall tale. Sometimes the parent will try to make things easier for himself by returning night

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[1]The Mode-Genre terminology is discussed in "Introduction to Literature Curriculum V," section B.

after night to the same protagonist ("The Adventures of _____"); so we have tale or short story turning into serial, turning into extended Romance or Novel.

Each of these elementary "Genres" has its own rules, conventions, imperatives, not the less binding because they are not clearly recognized as such by the "artist" in question. The exercise in personal apologetics must hew close to the line of probability because it will fail in its central intention if it is not <u>believed</u>. The braggart-hero may on the other hand indulge in exaggeration--indeed accept it as a rule of his game--perhaps even with a secret recognition that his audience however credulous will not believe <u>everything</u> he says, and perhaps even that disbelief in the substance of his tale may be more than balanced by admiration for the art of it, bringing another kind of triumph. He has accepted (already the genres are beginning to merge) the primary rule of the teller of the tale for its own sake, the rule of interest, of inventiveness, the necessity of playing out the baited line of suspense. The gossip-satirist dimly recognizes that her whispered judgments (but <u>why</u> is it always a woman?) must be made to accord with the commonly accepted values of the tribe (seldom of course as sophisticated as the "norm" of Reason in the satires of Swift and Pope), while she also if she is to hold her audience must attend to the rule of interest, demanding some exaggeration. So also with the bedside spinner of fantasies, who must be sufficiently talented to adhere to the rule of sustained invention, while perhaps humanizing his art and endowing the incredible with the real by making his protagonist's responses true to what his young audience knows of psychological probability (see the opening paragraphs of Chapter XIV of Coleridge's <u>Biographia Literaria</u>).

In such terms as these we might approach the Narrative Mode and its various formal manifestations, or Genres, in the classroom, beginning with things familiar and ordinary. We want first a general perspective on the Mode, some grasp of its all-pervading nature, with some attendant understanding that there are marked family relationships among the Modes. We want to account also for the continuing popularity of Narrative: story is a way of making sense of things, a way of thinking about experience, but different from, say, ethics, in the concreteness of episode and character which supplies the tug of interest in obedience to the pleasure principle. Finally, the success of the creative venture will depend in large measure upon the development and recognition of certain rules or conventions, which usually are clearly related to the intention inherent in the Genre, but also to the particular social situation in which the writer and his audience find themselves.

Let us turn immediately to the problem of conventions.

2. Some Narrative Conventions

One dictionary defines <u>convention</u> as "established usage. . . growing out of tacit agreement or custom." It is a definition that is broad and suggestive enough to suit our purposes well. "Usage" is

sufficiently general to remind us that there are conventions in, for instance, social behavior (manners) as well as in literature, and that some consideration of the working of social conventions may provide a useful perspective on literary conventions. The hint of redundancy in "established usage" may be forgiven, since it puts special emphasis on the imperative nature of conventions (they are indeed of the Establishment) and their general acceptance through repetition. When Joyce's Ulysses first appeared more than forty years ago, "stream-of-consciousness" writing was an innovation, something strange and new; imitative adaptations made it a convention, a resource in the public domain to be freely employed and creatively modified by writers in pursuit of their own original purposes. "Growing out of tacit agreement" is a useful concluding phrase because it makes it clear that conventions (and the genres they help to define) are not fixed forms (eternal ideas in some Platonic heaven), but are like social and political institutions subject to growth and change. Although they are formidably coercive they can themselves be coerced, and always are by the great writers (that bumbler Hamlet a tragic hero?--come now!). Finally, the definition establishes "tacit agreement" as the source of a convention's authority, which derives, like the British Constitution, from practice and precedent rather than from a written rulebook.[2]

In literature there are "established usages" in Form, in Style, in Subject, and in the handling of Point of View. Let us consider a few of the conventions that have special significance for the form and substance of Narrative. We shall place our major emphasis on Point-of-View Conventions, partly because of the continuing emphasis in our curriculum upon this aspect of literature, but also because it may seem to be of peculiar importance in Narrative.

A. Point of View: the "Documentary" Convention

Novel, Romance, Short Story, or Tale, is not fiction, and therefore untrue, but an historical document, or it is based upon such a document. "MS Found in a Bottle" (Poe). The Scarlet Letter record left by "Surveyor Pue." Defoe and Richardson can be thought of as the originators of this convention, in writing the Novel as Journal (Moll Flanders, Robinson Crusoe) and the Novel as Letters (Pamela, Clarissa Harlowe). The convention reveals the alliance between the Novel and History (the early titles nearly always began, "The History of . . ."), which in turn perhaps provided a reason for the detailed literalness of the realistic style; yet of course Poe adapts the convention to symbolic romance and Hawthorne employs the pretended document left by his old Surveyor in the service of a moral Romance with a mixture of allegory and symbolism. "Documentary" of course later comes to mean a novel (or a film) which has been researched, is based on both documents and

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[2] In the seventeenth century the French Academy with the support of the absolute monarchy went far toward codifying genre conventions for all time in something resembling a written constitution; perhaps its most spectacular result was the eighteenth century Voltaire's dismissal of Shakespeare because he broke the rules of classical tragedy.

field word (Zola's Germinal, Steinbeck's The Grapes of Wrath); but this simply emphasizes again the continuing alliance with history and sociology.

B. Point of View: The First-Person-Singular Convention

Although this convention is as old as Odysseus' story of his adventures (the heroic brag) at the court of Alcinous, its use in the Novel issues in Defoe and Richardson naturally from the Documentary Convention. In their simplest aspects both are authenticating devices. You must believe Lemuel Gulliver and Huck Finn and the narrator of "The Other Side of the Hedge" and Nick Carraway because they were there, it happened to them. But it is more than this and more complex and interesting than this.

For instance, the first three of these fictional spokesmen-protagonists clearly suffer from certain limitations of knowledge and vision ("But I had traveled more wisely" says Forster's narrator pompously in the tale's second paragraph); and so the reader, sharing a superior knowledge with the author about the protagonist, the ostensible author of the document, withholds full belief. In such cases, the document is an authenticating device only in that it seems to "prove" that the protagonist did exist, that these are his words, and that something like this probably happened to him. But the reader, learning not to trust his "source" entirely, must interpret its true meaning for himself. He begins to operate as does a true historian, whose first rule is skepticism of his documents, sources. And from this circumstance in the literary work issues an important artistic aspect of the convention of the obtuse or ignorant first person: irony, the comic or tragic discrepancy between the true knowledge of the protagonist's situation which we share with the real author and the protagonist's false or inadequate knowledge: Huck's "All right then, I'll go to hell," Oedipus assuming his responsibility as the guiltless savior of Thebes. In such matters the Modes draw together.

But even though the first-person-singular convention may seem to grow out of the documentary convention and the historicism it seems to represent, and even though it is one of the conventional conditions of irony, the persistent popularity of first-person narration probably can be explained more simply: it has dramatic immediacy: the reader feels in direct relationship with the protagonist-narrator; direct and continuous relationship, with no interruptions from the novelist, who slyly conceals himself from view, seeming to say, There it is, make what you will of it. If our interpretation is wrong, at least it was left up to us, and that in itself is always a source of pleasure: it puts us in an active relationship with the real author. We are involved.

The convention allows two kinds of narrator, which may be called hero-narrator and observer-narrator, the former standing at the center of the action, the latter somewhere at its outer boundary. Huck

Finn and the narrator of Forster's "Hedge" are hero-narrators, Nick Carraway and Conrad's Marlow are, or seem to be, observer-narrators, since Jay Gatsby and Kurtz in "The Heart of Darkness" seem to be the "heroes" of their narratives. Yet clearly Nick and Marlow are much more than observers: they are both profoundly changed by what they have seen and participated in, they have made the descent into evil (like Dante--"observer-narrator"?) and have returned scarred but enlightened (as Huck really is not at the end of his story). Presumably the same may be true of the Ishmael of Moby Dick, even though much of the time his voice seems disembodied. All three, in the phrase of one of Conrad's titles, are "secret sharers" in the experience of the ostensible hero, Gatsby or Kurtz or Ahab. Seldom, then, is the first-person-singular only an observer; and one may even feel that Nick and Marlow at least are the real protagonists of their stories, that Gatsby and Kurtz are somehow only subtle projections of the narrator's consciousness.

C. Point of View: The Omniscient-Author Convention

It is clear that Nick and Marlow know more than Huck and Forster's narrator, are more subtle and aware; and Nick also is infinitely more knowing than his subjects, Gatsby and the Buchanans and the rest of his cast of characters. In a sense also one may feel that how the narrator got his knowledge, how it came to him, is the true subject of both The Great Gatsby and Heart of Darkness (both carry on a kind of detective work in putting together the biographical data of their subjects).

Nick and Marlow, then, in their superior knowledge resemble the omniscient author as narrator, with the difference that the detective work ("research") of the latter is usually concealed, and that although we certainly feel in a kind of relationship with the narrators "Nathaniel Hawthorne" and "Thomas Hardy" it is never a dramatic relationship and we do not care a hoot about them as people (even though we may be most interested in their ideas and attitudes).

The "Teacher Version" discussions of The Scarlet Letter and The Mayor of Casterbridge and of some of the tales and stories (see especially "The Garden Party") make specific observations on the different ways in which the Omniscient Author Convention may be used for quite different effects--as can the First Person Singular. "Omniscient" may be misleading: the Author was seldom really omniscient even in the great Victorian examples of the Convention. A familiar formula of the limited omniscience assumption goes something like this: "I really do not know what thoughts were going through Dorothea's mind at this moment." Such frank confessions of limited knowledge actually, one suspects, contribute to the illusion that the fictional characters have

an independent existence and move about in a real world at the command of their own secret emotional drives and willed intentions.[3] In any case, it is certainly not true that any one of the several point-of-view conventions is superior to the others in creating the illusion of reality; and it was probably really not such a notion that gave the Omniscient Author Convention a bad name in the twentieth century, but instead certain misuses of the Convention by writers like Dickens and Thackeray and George Eliot, who otherwise use it with considerable artistry. When Dickens asks us to weep with him at the death of Little Nell[4], when Thackeray reprimands Becky Sharpe, and when George Eliot preaches, we are offended because the author is trying to coerce not his convention but us. But we may note that the illusion of the reality of the fictional world is not really affected. Indeed, the novelist would not weep or reprimand or preach if the characters were not felt somehow as real even by the novelist himself. It may well be that these lapses of artistic judgment actually were the result of the author's succumbing to the illusion that he himself has created.

Because in modern critical parlance the word "dramatic" is probably most frequently applied to novels employing the First Person Singular Convention or some modification of it, for the reason that it shuts the door on the real author just as effectively as the circumstance of the stage does, it is important to emphasize that the dramatic devices of setting and scene and dialogue may be developed quite as fully and dramatically in the Omniscient-Author novel. Indeed, the extended dramatic dialogue may often seem to threaten the reality illusion in the first-person novel or story, for who could, in life, quote the exact words of such presumably remembered dialogues? The reason the novelist can get away with it is that one of the great virtues of conventions is that, since like old family friends they are of course familiar, they discourage embarrassing questions. The outsider's rudeness will nevertheless be encountered: there will be classroom questions about Nick Carraway's incredible memory for overheard dialogue. The honest answer can only be that even "realism" requires a "willing suspension of disbelief," that it also is an art of conventions, and that a convention can sometimes be thought of as a kind of hypothesis that must be arbitrarily accepted at the start, with everything else depending on that acceptance.

D. Point of View: The "Middle Ground Convention"

There is no commonly accepted term for this convention, which appears in Steinbeck's "The Chrysanthemums" and Mansfield's "The Garden Pary." The voice is the third person of the omniscient author, but the perspective is that of a single character within the world of the

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[3]Fiction writers have testified that they themselves often have such an illusion about their own characters. See Gide's The Counterfeiters, in which the novelist within his own novel laments in his Journal that this or that character is getting out of hand.

[4]His Victorian audience, generally, happily complied. There were however notable exceptions. Oscar Wilde remarked that that man must indeed have a heart of stone who does not laugh at the death of Little Nell.

narrative, resulting in a sense of direct dramatic involvement resembling the effect of the first person singular. It is actually, however, much less confining, in that it allows the writer to use his own resources of style and insight to supplement the comparatively limited vision of the protagonist while avoiding the essay-like interventions of omniscience. It would seem to be a convention peculiarly appropriate for the dramatic handling of an intellectually limited central character, when the author wants not an ironic but a sympathetic attitude toward him; but the artistic success of James's use of it for the treatment of Lambert Strether in The Ambassadors makes it clear that the device can be brilliantly used with a protagonist of the most refined intelligence. There would seem to be no end to the variations that can be played upon any of our conventions. Of this one, it is enough to say that it allows the writer a broader range of effects and great flexibility of manipulation than the first-person-singular convention, while at the same time it prevents the overt appearance of the author on the stage of his own theater.

Perhaps the best way of getting students to see the full artistic significance of an author's choice of point of view is to ask occasionally for the rewriting of a page or two of one of our narratives with a shift from the original convention to one of the others. Certain shifts may be found to be impossible without some really radical change in the story's meaning.

These four conventions seem peculiarly important to the student of Narrative since they represent artistic choices that are simply not, for instance, available to the dramatist--not really, even though he may try to adapt the narrator-persona to stage purposes as in Wilder's Our Town. The point-of-view decision is crucial and would seem to determine, however subtly, nearly all of the other effects of the narrative.

E. Style and Subject Conventions

But of course there are other conventions that seem almost inseparable from prose narrative as we know it in our time--for instance, what may be called the "Introspective Convention," a Convention of method or style by means of which accounts in the third person of the state of consciousness and mental activity of a character may be provided at any moment; this freedom to "go inside" does not seem to be allowed the dramatist, although of course the soliloquies of a Hamlet or Macbeth clearly anticipate the device. In narrative, however, a shift in point of view from third person to first results in the dramatic immediacy of the "Interior-Monologue" or "Stream-of-Consciousness" Convention--again a style convention: instead of being told what Stephen thought we are given Stephen thinking. It is another interesting example of the adaptation of a dramatic style to narrative uses, although it is more common to take note of its historical origins in the development of Romantic subjectivism (the protagonist of the "Ode to a Nightingale" exploring his own inner consciousness) with an immediate influence from modern psychology (the "stream" metaphor of course came from William James). It should be obvious that any

claim that may be made for stream-of-consciousness writing as a "realistic" record of the actual stuff of a random mental state is clearly fraudulent: the Convention "stands for" or represents, it does not record, and the writing itself is under the shrewd conscious control of the author, is highly organized, as any careful study of Molly Bloom's famous soliloquy will show. Its aim is the old one, the creation of artistic illusion. The psychologist's case history may make use of certain narrative conventions, but not this one which psychology may seem to have furnished: the purpose of the case history is not illusion but clinical truth, and it rejects the dramatic "stream."

Other conventions of plot and character and style usually turn out not to be the exclusive property of Narrative. The so-called "flashback" has epic origins and a clear parallel in the dramatist's Exposition. Character schematization, discussed in the "Teacher Version" consideration of The Mayor of Casterbridge, is as much the property of drama as of narrative, and the same is true of character types (Braggart Warrior, Alienated Hero, the Malcontent, Machiavellian--later Satanic--Villain), if they can be called Conventions; and technical Conventions, such as the Convention of Withheld Information (considered in the "Teacher Version" of The Great Gatsby), with its great effects of curiosity and mystification and suspense, cut across Modal boundaries and are of ancient origin (where is Father Odysseus, who is the Evil One of Thebes?). There are undoubtedly significant differences between the use of them in Drama and their use in Narrative, but they need not be explored here. It seems best now to turn to a discussion of some of the Genres, or sub-types, of the Narrative Mode, with incidental reference to some conventions that may be peculiar to them.

3. Narrative Genres

A. "Novel"

The "Teacher Versions" of the introductions to the narratives on the eleventh-year list make frequent use of our first broad distinction, that between "Novel" and "Romance."

"Novel" is characterized in terms of subject by Clara Reeves in the eighteenth century as "a picture of real life and manners, and of the time in which it was written"; and by Hawthorne in terms of intention, with an implied mandate for method and style, as a work which aims "at a very minute fidelity, not merely to the possible, but to the probable and ordinary course of man's experience." We have given what amounts to a different version of the same definition in the discussion of the Documentary Convention and its relation to the first-person-singular of the early journal and epistolary novels. The Novel, then, is simply Realism in action. It has seemed to many literary historians clearly to reveal its socio-historical origins: in subject, intention, method, it has seemed peculiarly congenial to the pragmatically-minded middle class (proudly defined by Robinson Crusoe at the start of

his journal), who must have secretly recognized their affinity with that practical and eminently successful jailbird Moll Flanders.

The Novel's most obvious Conventions would seem to be consistent with the foregoing observations. The concept of the anti-hero is first given explicit expression by Dostoievsky, but Moll Flanders and Crusoe represent a sharp break (anticipated in the picaresque narratives) with the heroic tradition. On the other hand, it frequently appears that only their values (Prosperity is Virtue, Prudence is her Handmaiden, the Ideal Man is the Ingenious Man, etc.) are anti-heroic; their commercial and industrial exploits, their practical skills, their powers of endurance often seem satisfactorily superhuman, justifying Dreiser's title for one of his novels about the American business man, The Titan.[5] Related to the "Realistic-Hero Convention" are what may be called Thematic and Plot Conventions. The dominant themes of the Novel may be somewhat flippantly defined as Money, Manners, Marriage, and Morals--an alliterative quartet that effectively summarizes the substance of The Great Gatsby. Wealth and the values of Hedonism (although usually disguised) have replaced the Grail of the Romance quests and the Salvation of Bunyan's as goals. Get rich and found a family. Failure of course always threatens: there is a middleclass Tragedy. One is called The Mayor of Casterbridge. Manners and Morals ("Values" of course is better) are related concerns. Manners should transparently show forth a man's true inner spirit, but in a highly competitive capitalist society all too frequently they cannot be allowed to: Gatsby's manners, crude though they are (he is a parody-gentleman) are a disguise created as a means to an end. In a rapidly changing and socially fluid society, the concern with these two conventional themes and their problematic nature has been crucial and continuous.

The "minute fidelity. . .to the probable" of Hawthorne's definition demands of the novelist a systematic observation ("research") of the surface particulars of "the ordinary course of man's experience," and provides a mandate for a Language or Style Convention: we may expect the ideal style of the Novel to be heavily weighted with the language of fact, nouns chosen for their denotative clarity, a diction of measurement (see the passages on style in the "Teacher Version" of Mark Twain's Roughing It); and the aim of achieving the fullest possible realization of the actual world would seem to discourage any economical terseness. Balzac's "density of specification ("minute fidelity"), in Henry James' phrase, is the effect to be aimed at, and it often results in descriptive prolixity. The tone of this ideal style is impersonal, detached, quasi-scientific: the evocative idiom of poetry, the ambiguous effects of metaphor--these are to be suppressed. One thinks of Stendhal's not entirely ironic remark that he had based his style upon the Code Napoleon and Zola's complaint that French writing in his time was still rotten with lyricism. (A reaction against all this would of course set in. May The Great Gatsby because of its poetic texture be thought of as an anti-Novel?)

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[5] The Dostoievskian anti-hero, the alienated and ineffectual louse, is a counter-development and can be understood as a convention developed in protest against the dominant values of the society.

Thus the set of aims and of conventions of subject, character, theme, and style that help to define the genre Novel, a literary kind that seems to have developed in direct response to a radically changing social situation in England and western Europe and America. The terms we have used should be understood as representing broad tendencies or norms, which are seldom revealed with any purity in any particular novel; and we have already parenthetically hinted that perhaps the most interesting "novelists" of the last seventy-five years have coerced some or all of these conventions almost out of existence. But some awareness of the original assumptions and aims of the Genre is necessary if the particular work is to be fully understood and enjoyed, or to recognize that one may reasonably use a term like "anti-Novel."

B. "Romance"

The Novel was a late-comer in the world of literature and in the nineteenth century was in certain quarters still of doubtful respectability (Emerson, for instance, was most condescending). "Romance" in our context is used for "non-realistic" narratives whose most characteristic traits or conventions are survivals from a pre-capitalist world (although of course adapted to modern purposes). The "Romance" in medieval literature is the chivalric narrative (students have read some of the Arthurian stories), often associated with some aspect of the courtly love conventions and making use of generally idealized characters. Even in the fourteenth century our polar opposites of Romance and Realism are apparent in the comic contrast between Chaucer's "The Knight's Tale" and the Wife of Bath's story of the ups and downs of her marital life (the Renaissance provides Don Quixote and Sancho Panza, in the work often thought of as the true ancestor of the Novel). Associated with the Romance in the Medieval and early Renaissance family of forms are Parable, Dream Narrative, Allegory, and Pastoral (Forster's "The Other Side of the Hedge" is clearly in the Pastoral tradition). All of these are easily identifiable in terms of fairly clearcut Conventions: the subject matter and tone of the Romance, the circumstance and fantasy content of the Dream, the abstract character names of Allegory and the spare terms of Parable, and the idealized rural setting of Pastoral. A moral intention is apparent in all of them.

So far as our practical problem of terminology is concerned, however, we shall at times use "Romance" or "Romantic Narrative" as a general tag for all of the non-realistic works on our list, using more precise terms like allegory and pastoral frequently in their adjectival forms (an allegorical or pastoral element in _____).

The Novel, as we have tried to show, is clearly a Genre of our times; but how can we account for the viability of Romance in our prosaic era? Is it anything but a deplorable atavistic manifestation?

It is a complex problem which, happily, we need only to touch upon lightly here. Popular Romance--the Neo-Gothic thrillers of magazine and film (we shall consider "Gothic" in a moment)--of course offers escape and sensationalism to a bored audience whose lives are otherwise controlled by the fixed routines of a business and industrial world. We shall see, however, that the Gothic conventions can be turned to more or less profound psychological and moral purposes (Poe will serve as an example), thus striking a somber chord in the modern consciousness. Writers like Hawthorne and Forster have felt themselves--unlike Defoe and his American counterpart Franklin--morally alienated from the success-oriented societies in which they have lived, and presumably found the techniques of parable and allegorical fantasy and pastoral still useful as weapons of criticism, especially in the short narrative forms (Forster's longer works are recognizably Novels). It is perhaps fitting that the alienated writer should use <u>forms</u> alien to his times for the purpose of criticizing them.

C. Romance: "Gothic"

"Gothic" narrative needs some separate attention. The Gothic novels (romances) of Walpole and Mrs. Radcliffe and "Monk" Lewis had by the end of the eighteenth century established the main conventions of the Genre. They were for the most part subject rather than formal conventions. "Gothic" (any literary handbook or dictionary may be consulted) meant quite simply that the narrative was set in the medieval past, although the "Gothicist" was really indifferent to historical accuracy and the time-setting is usually as vague as it is in Poe. The characteristic place-setting is a ruined castle equipped with an ancestral ghost or two (Eino Railo calls his book on the subject <u>The Haunted Castle</u>), and plot episodes tend to be nocturnal adventures. The idea of the <u>ruin</u> is significant: the conventional Gothic atmosphere is permeated by decay and putrefaction, and grave, vault, or catacomb is one of the ruling motifs. Reptiles and insects are part of the conventional machinery, and the "romantic" love of Gothicism nearly always comes bearing intimations of incest or necrophilia or both. Although the "heroine" is usually a pure maiden pursued by horrors, the most characteristic (conventional) female characters are "fatal-women" who are often in some sort of alliance with a satanic hero--a more or less crude descendant of Milton's Satan who is guilty of unspeakable crimes, suffers from a sense of damnation, but nevertheless must work to bring others down with him in his fall (a plot convention). The ostensible ruling intention of the Gothic is to inspire terror, but the real result is usually only titillation. Lewis's <u>The Monk</u> is probably the best of the more easily available early representatives of the Genre. It might well be referred to as "The Modern Reader's Compendium of Gothic Conventions." All of them.

It is easy enough to identify the conventions as they appear in Poe: the House of Usher as ruined castle, Madeline Usher as living corpse and beloved twin sister too, the hint of forbidden vices in the

brother, the variation on both the corpse and ghost Conventions in "The Masque of the Red Death," and the emphasis on horrified suspense throughout (Will the Worm get the Girl?). It is not so easy to explain why Poe's effects, so patently attached to the Gothic Conventions as they are, inspire laughter much less frequently than those of Lewis's Romance-Novel. The prose of course is generally--although not always--better (meaning not that Lewis is sometimes as good as Poe but that Poe is often quite as bad as Lewis); but one may feel that Poe's successes are not entirely the result of stylistic skill (at its best the style suggests skill rather than genius). It is perhaps that the subject-matter Conventions of Gothic were in fact from the start of great potential psychological power as dream or nightmare symbols, and that Poe managed in his adaptations to strip away the narrative elements not strictly essential to his psychological concerns, leaving us in the most immediate and unrelieved contact with the images of claustrophobia and death wish and masochism and all the other murky appeals of the Irrational. It is fortunate that the magazine limitation, if it could not force taste, forced brevity upon him. It is of course also quite probable--bitter anti-democrat that he was (see for example the sketch "King Mob")--that he took a special delight in confronting his comfort-loving and reasonable audience with the death that nothing can buy off and the literary symbols of unreason as a shock to complacency. This at least was how Baudelaire saw him and one reason for the French poet's deep sense of affinity with him.

The ways in which Poe "coerced" the Gothic imperatives in the interest of originality cannot be discovered by our students on their own, for they will not have read the earlier Gothic experiments; but some teachers may wish to read briefly to them from The Monk or perhaps some of the more comically delectable passages from Horace Walpole's The Castle of Otranto, and let them try to discover the differences. After Poe the conventions tend to separate themselves from the Genre to be creatively adapted to works and purposes for which the word Gothic would be inappropriate: e.g., Dickens's Great Expectations, in which Satis House is clearly a modern version of ruined castle (brewer's mansion as _____!) and Miss Havisham its ruling ghost out of the dead past; while Estella is a rationalized version of the femme fatale. The conventions appear and reappear throughout Dickens in a bewildering series of variations. William Faulkner is undoubtedly the ruling Goth of the twentieth century ("A Rose for Emily" out-Monks "Monk" Lewis). It is again interesting that Dickens and Faulkner were, like Hawthorne and Forster, hostile to the dominant values of their societies, and like them turned to their own critical purposes "Romantic" conventions which might in themselves seem most uncongenial to the middleclass temper. It is another aspect of creative originality.

D. The Creative Amalgam

Dickens indicates in some of the short prefaces he wrote for his narratives that he thought of them as "realistic," and certainly it would be a silly flouting of common practice to call his long works anything but Novels. Hawthorne of course remarked upon the significant ways in which his works in perspective and tone and subject differ from the Novel, but his strong contemporary concerns, so clearly revealed in the Letter, and sometimes his handling of descriptive detail in the longer works clearly ally them with the realistic tradition. So we are brought again to our ruling emphasis: few literary forms in our time are "pure." Students need some understanding of Genres as "ideal types" in order that they may not, for instance, reject Hawthorne for not being a "realist" or a somber realist like George Eliot for not being "romantic." But the study of Genres and their Conventions is perhaps most useful for the ways in which it helps to illuminate the creative amalgamations of different conventions and attitudes that most important literary works are.

Of the narratives before us this year, perhaps The Great Gatsby provides the best occasion for studying the creative amalgam. Its subject is clearly "novelistic," but the "Teacher Version" discussion associates Gatsby's story with the Grail quest and Daisy Fay with the femme fatale and Gatsby's house with feudal manor. Another association might identify Gatsby as one of the many descendants of Don Quixote (his beautiful, beautiful shirts his only armor), with Daisy not so much Morgan le Fay as another version of the Dulcinea dream; and when the dream, the life-giving ideal, is no longer tenable, Jay, like the foolish magnificent Don, must die. The mystery about Gatsby's past which Fitzgerald creates for him seems to exist primarily to satisfy the ordinary person's incurable need for some image of the romantic adventurer, and at the end, although Gatsby is proved only a bootlegger and although Nick himself sees him with clear "realistic" eyes, when it comes to a choice anyone of course would opt for Jay's romantic values. And when we turn to the book's style, if as we have said that of the novel is weighted with the language of fact and marked by descriptive prolixity, then surely Fitzgerald's style is by contrast poetic, "romantic" in its brilliant metaphorical texture and impressionistic evocation of atmosphere, resulting in a tone which indeed suggests a world strange and dreamlike, as the "Teacher Version" remarks, even when the subject is the most sordid of drunken parties. Such is the effect of The Great Gatsby, a "Novel" that constantly evokes the spirit of "Romance," and such also may be the effect of the other long narratives on the year's list. Only in working with some of the shorter narratives are we likely to feel justified in making unqualified Genre identifications.

4. "Tale" and "Short Story"

The necessary circumstance for the development of the shorter forms of prose narrative was of course the rise of the magazine as a periodical publication aimed at securing subscribers from a wider segment of the population than that which supported early nineteenth

century periodicals like the Edinburgh Review. Magazines like Dickens' Household Words were weighted on the side of serious non-fiction essays (including in this case a great deal of social criticism) but also provided some fiction as, presumably, bait. The fiction could be novels printed in serial installments or short independent pieces--tale or story.

Poe's famous pronouncements on the "rules" of the tale in his review of one of Hawthorne's collections is famous but perhaps something less than entirely satisfactory--for instance, it could reasonably be argued that in the Novel also nothing should be used that does not contribute directly to the effect. "Effect" itself is troublesome. In one of the essays on poetic composition Poe proposes intensity of effect as the chief aim of poetry, associates intensity with brevity, and then draws the conclusion that there is no such thing as a long poem, suggesting the narrative parallel that there is no such thing as a long prose Romance or Novel. "Intensity of effect" itself is a subjective criterion that suggests a kind of seismographic criticism. However, viewed in the somewhat more objective terms of enforced economy of statement, of preparation and development, the shorter forms may have structural and stylistic characteristics that derive from the space restriction but issue in an aesthetic result that may indeed, as one of the "Teacher Versions" suggests, be comparable to lyric as opposed to metrical romance or epic. There are arts of concentration (Poe's "intensity"?) and arts of expansion or diffusion. But these characteristics remain elusive (the short story has received little critical attention) and the Conventions by which it lives would appear to be borrowed from its parent form the Novel. Even the question of length may turn out to be troublesome--how short is "short"? So we have had "short short story," "short story," "long short story," "novelette," "short novel"--a list much more ridiculous than that of Polonius.

However, although we may be uneasy about definition, the short forms can of course be studied--perhaps most profitably in terms of the solution of the artistic problems imposed by the arbitrary space restriction. How would the introduction of the character of Henchard have to be handled if the Mayor were to be rewritten as a short story? What differences might there be in the treatment of the plot of "The Garden Party" if it were a chapter in a novel instead of an independent piece? If it could stand as it is, what might have preceded it, what would follow? Could any of the episodes of one of our three long narratives be made to stand alone as a short story? What changes, if any, would have to be made in them?

Parable and Allegory seem, as we have suggested, to be pure Genres when they appear as short forms, and they may have attracted a writer like Forster simply because they do not demand any real character development, which always threatens us with prolixity. In any case, Forster's choice of the word "tale" for his short pieces, following the practice of Poe and Hawthorne, reminds us of the old and

useful distinction: the association of "tale" with the Romance tradition and of "short story" with the Conventions of the Novel, of Realism.

But here as elsewhere the terms are of little importance except as a means of facilitating critical--which is to say pedagogical--discourse. Romance, Tale, Novel, Short Story?--it is the Romance, the Tale, the Novel, the Short Story that must always be the real, concrete object of our attention, for our profit and, even more important, our delight.

Tell me a story indeed.